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Boston University

News & Notes

Boston University School of Medicine



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ORIENTATION 1986



From left, first-year students Anthony Weiner, John Saperstein and Adrienne Sarno chat at Sept. 2 reception given by the BUSM Alumni Association on Talbot Green. See story on page 3.

NEW TEST ACCURATELY MEASURES MOLD TOXINS

A new four-minute test that can identify trace amounts of a lethal toxin in foodstuffs has been developed by a group of scientists from BUSM's School of Public Health, Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The test, known as the Aflatest Mycotoxin Testing System, is being manufactured by Vicam in Medford, Mass. John Groopman, Ph.D., an associate professor of public health and an assistant professor of microbiology, was a member of the team that created the more efficient way to test grain crops for aflatoxin, a highly carcinogenic and toxic product of mold-related food spoilage that has been linked to human disease and agricultural losses throughout the world. The Aflatest System came about as the result of BUSM's Technology Transfer Program, which links innovative research to outside companies willing and able to manufacture these kinds of new products.

Aflatoxin has been associated with human liver cancer and it has been known to suppress the body's immune system. It can occur in virtually all grains, in such crops as peanuts and in milk. It is one of the chemicals produced by the mold aspergillus flavus and is often the result of improper food storage although, in areas of the world with high humidity, the mold can contaminate the grain as it grows in the field.

"The new test eliminates the high cost and time delays of earlier procedures. It requires no special skills or training, and yet has the potential for saving millions of dollars and improving the safety of food worldwide," said Groopman.

ADOPTIVE IMMUNOTHERAPY SHOWS
PROMISE FOR CANCER PATIENTS

Based on the encouraging results of a clinical trial involving 25 terminally-ill cancer patients, researchers at the Humphrey Cancer Research Center have begun a second round of trials of a new form of cancer treatment to determine if its ability to shrink tumors without causing harmful side effects can be significantly enhanced. The research on the technique, known as adoptive immunotherapy, is being conducted at BUSM by Michael Osband, M.D., an associate professor of pediatrics and director of the Laboratory for Cellular Immunology. Robert Krane, M.D., chairman of the Department of Urology, and Gennaro Carpinito, M.D., director of the Laboratory of Urological Immunobiology at BUSM, also are involved in the research.

"This treatment employs a two-pronged attack against malignant tumors," Osband explained. "First, the patient's own white blood cells are made more sensitive to the tumor. At the same time, patients are treated in such a manner as to block the development of suppressor cells that would normally 'turn off' the anti-tumor immune response." Osband is scheduled to present results from the adoptive immunotherapy research at the October meeting of the American College of Surgeons in New Orleans.

The results from the initial trial, conducted from 1982 through 1985, showed that five patients experienced a significant reduction in tumor size, and four became stable for long periods of time. The second group of patients is being treated with greater numbers of immunized cells and on an outpatient basis, rather than spending days in the hospital as is the case in other adoptive immunotherapy programs underway elsewhere. "This ability to avoid hospitalization is a reflection of the low toxicity associated with our approach," Osband said. To help conduct the current study, new facilities for the Clinical Immunotherapy Program have opened at BUMC. The new quarters will provide a central, comfortable space for the cell infusions and other work associated with the treatment and research.

STUDY SUPPORTS GENETIC
COMPONENT IN HOMOSEXUALITY

Gay men are more likely than heterosexuals to have a gay brother, suggesting that male homosexuality may run in families, according to a recent report by School of Medicine researchers in the July issue of Archives of General Psychiatry.

"We found that 20 percent of the gay men we interviewed had brothers who were predominantly or exclusively homosexual, compared to 4 percent of the heterosexual men interviewed," said Richard C. Pillard, M.D., a professor of psychiatry at BUSM and principal investigator of the study. Pillard and co-author James D. Weinrich, Ph.D., an assistant research professor of psychiatry, said their study suggests that male homosexuality does not occur completely at random; that there is, in fact, a strong familial component to homosexuality, and that a genetic influence could possibly reinforce environmentally-learned behaviors.

Pillard and Weinrich studied 101 volunteers--50 gay men and 51 heterosexual men--over a three-year period. The men were similar in age, education, job status, and none were married. All answered questions about their own sexual orientation as well as that of parents, siblings who were over 20 years of age, and other relatives. Pillard and Weinrich followed up

with questionnaires, and interviews with the siblings. The authors found that homosexuality seems to run along male lines since the number of lesbian sisters of gay men did not vary from that found in the general population. A follow-up three-year study under way will examine the familial aspects of lesbianism.

1986 ORIENTATION FEATURES
ALUMNI RECEPTION, DINNER

Incoming BUSM I students attended a reception and dinner given by the BUSM Alumni Association on Sept. 2, and a coffee reception with faculty members on Sept. 5. Roberta Apfel '62, the president of the Alumni Association and the first woman to hold that position, welcomed the new students at the dinner, held on the Talbot Green.

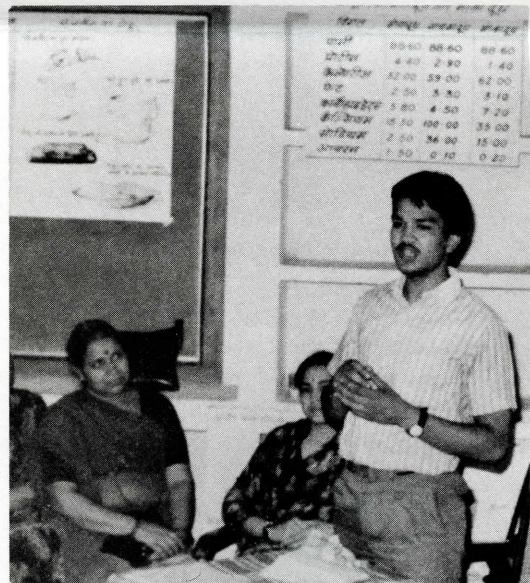
There are 79 men and 56 women in the Class of 1990. Forty-six are members of the Six-Year Program, 13 are enrolled in the MMEDIC program, and four are part of the EMSSP program. There are 18 minority students in the incoming Class, and seven M.D-Ph.D. students. The students represent a total of 25 states and Canada.

GRANT BACKS STUDENT'S WORK
ON MALNUTRITION IN INDIA

A second-year student recently returned to BUSM from India where he had been working on a project he developed to combat malnutrition.

Manoj K. Jain, was the recipient of a SmithKline Beckman Medical Perspectives Fellowship for \$3,800 in support of his project, "Educating Health Workers and Villagers in India on the Dietary Uses of Soy Foods." He received one of only 34 such fellowships provided by the National Fund for Medical Education in 1986.

Jain, who was born in India, traveled to the Indore district in the central region of the country, where he spent three months educating health workers and villagers on the nutritional value of soy foods and how they can be used in various dishes. Jain, who is working toward a combined M.D.-M.P.H. degree at BUSM, also met with public health directors and government ministers to urge them to continue with the program after he left. Two districts in the state of Madhya Pradesh have agreed to try it.



Jain conducts a nutrition work-
shop with local health educators
in the Indore district.

PROTHROW-STITH APPOINTED
TO PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL

Deborah Prothrow-Stith, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine, was named a member of the state's Public Health Council in August. The Public Health Council is the policy-making branch of the Commonwealth's Department of Public Health. The Council regulates and licenses hospitals; approves hospital expansions that are budgeted at over

\$600,000; and regulates foods, drugs and chemicals in Massachusetts. Most recently, the Council has made a proposal to the Boston School Committee to allow health clinics at four local high schools to dispense contraceptives to students who have parental consent.

Prothrow-Stith also is an attending physician of the Boston Youth Program and is clinical chief of the adolescent's clinic at the Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center in Dorchester. Much of her work revolves around such issues as adolescent violence, which she believes must be viewed as a public-health problem whose solution should involve the schools, parents and children, media, police and employers.

COURTISS ELECTED CHAIRMAN
OF PLASTIC SURGERY BOARD

Eugene H. Courtiss, M.D., an assistant clinical professor of plastic surgery, has been elected chairman of the American Board of Plastic Surgery. Courtiss assumes the presidency during the Board's 50th anniversary year. He also is a member of the Residency Review Committee in Plastic Surgery, book review editor of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, and a past president and trustee of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery.

STUDENTS HONORED BY
MCGRAW-HILL BOOK AWARDS

Two students from BUSM's Class of 1989 recently received awards from the McGraw-Hill Book Company for being the top ranking students in the first-year class last year. As the top ranking medical student, Anil Goyal received copies of "Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine, 10th Edition," "The PreTest Self Assessment and Review Book" and one copy each of the seven Basic Science PreTest titles. As the second ranking first-year student, Andrew Abramowitz also received copies of the first two, plus "Cardiovascular Physiology, 2nd Edition" by Mohrman and Heller and "Pulmonary Physiology, 2nd Edition" by Levitzky.

FALL HEALTH NET
PROGRAMS SCHEDULED

In October, the Area Health Education Center's Health NET will air three programs of particular relevance to Boston residents on successive Fridays from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. on Boston Cablevision's access channels A3 and A8. Live broadcasts of the programs are offered to neighborhood health center staff and other professionals for continuing medical education credits.

On Oct. 10, representatives from the Commonwealth's Department of Public Health Advocacy and Mayor Flynn's Boston Committee on Access to Health Care will discuss problems the public has in obtaining needed health services. On Oct. 17, a discussion about the Commonwealth's "Healthy Start" program will be featured. This program provides pre- and post-natal care to uninsured women. On Oct. 24, information about the "Healthy Baby" program will be presented. The program is an effort to decrease the number of preterm births in the City by providing nurse advocates for high-risk mothers.

Other Health NET programs scheduled for this fall include: "Pediatric Neurological Screening for 'Soft Signs'" on Sept. 26; "Treating the Elderly:

Diseases of the Heart" and "The Role of Diet in Heart Disease" on Oct. 1; "Treating the Elderly: Cognitive Impairment and Social Deprivation" on Oct. 31; and "A Three-Part Series on Alcohol Abuse" on Nov. 7, 14 and 21.

UH PRESIDENT ELECTED CHAIR
OF BOSTON HOSPITAL GROUP

J. Scott Abercrombie Jr., M.D., president of University Hospital and a clinical professor of pathology and medicine BUSM, has been named chairman of the Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals (COBTH). Access to quality health care and the future of physician-training programs in the face of federal cutbacks are two items of deep concern to the Council, according to Abercrombie.

UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR HONORED
FOR MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY RESEARCH

Sol Levine, Ph.D., a professor of socio-medical sciences and community medicine and public health, has been awarded the 1986 Leo G. Reeder Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Medical Sociology by the Medical Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association. The award was presented during the ASA's annual meeting in New York City.

ANNAS CO-CHAIRS
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

George J. Annas, J.D., M.P.H., the Edward R. Uteley Professor of Health Law and chief of the Health Law Section of the School of Public Health, co-chaired the First International Conference on Health Law and Ethics, held in August in Sydney, Australia. The conference was sponsored by the American Society of Law and Medicine, with many co-sponsors, including BUSM and the Health Law Section of SPH. According to Annas, the conference drew more than 300 participants from six continents.

In addition to co-chairing the meeting, Annas presented papers on issues related to the artificial heart and human embryo research. ASLM plans to sponsor the Second International Conference on Health Law and Ethics in London in July 1988.

UPDATE: BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SHUTTLE BUS SCHEDULE

The schedule for the Boston University Shuttle Bus, which runs between the Medical Center and the Charles River Campus, is as follows:

Shuttle buses depart from the Heartland Drug Store at 1266 Commonwealth Ave. at 8 and 11 a.m., and at 1:30, 3:30 and 6:30 p.m. At 10:30 p.m., a bus departs for the Medical Center from the Huntington Theatre on Huntington Ave. Buses leave the Medical Center at 9 a.m., noon, 2:30, 4:40 and 7:30 p.m. An additional shuttle from the Huntington Theatre to the Charles River Campus leaves at 11 p.m.

The shuttle makes a number of stops along Commonwealth Ave., between Heartland Drug Store and Kenmore Square. Buses run Monday through Friday only and are a service provided by the University's Division of Student Affairs, 775 Commonwealth Ave. For additional information, call 353-3635.

HIGH HOLIDAYS CELEBRATED
AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY

A special invitation is extended to Medical Center personnel to attend High Holiday services at Boston University Hillel,

located at 233 Bay State Road.

Rosh Hashanah services will begin at sundown on Friday, Oct. 3. Yom Kippur services will begin at sundown on Sunday, Oct. 12. Reform, conservative and orthodox services will be available. For information, please call 266-3880 or 353-3633.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Ronald J. Ellis, an M.D.-Ph.D. student in the Class of 1989, recently received a predoctoral fellowship from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Ellis' research project, entitled "Cerebral Laterality in Aging Alcoholics," is being carried out in the BUSM Laboratory of Neuropsychology.

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